

being profoundly unfair to many young people by refusing admission to their program to gay teenagers and adults. It should be emphasized that the Boy Scouts make no claim that this is based on the need to protect scouts from sexual abuse. Every organization dealing with young people ought to have very strict policies, with rigorous enforcement, to protect young people against any adult engaging in inappropriate sexual activity with them. But the Boy Scout policy is based not on this fear, but on their explicit view that being gay is inconsistent with being "morally straight" and being "clean in word and deed." In other words, the Scout's policy is simply a condemnation of the character and integrity of all gay men.

This official policy by the national organization puts a number of people of good will in a difficult situation. There are a large number of men—and women as well—who participate in and are supportive of the Boy Scouts because the organization does do a great deal of good work. But they quite correctly abhor the cruel, discriminatory policy of the Scouts. Some have responded by ending their affiliation. Others have taken an equally honorable course—staying for now within the organization but fighting explicitly and openly against its discriminatory policy. I admire the willingness of people to do this. At some point it may become clear that the Boy Scout organization is irrevocably committed to this biased policy, but there have been encouraging signs of dissent in many parts of the country and I am hoping that those courageous people who are making this fight within the Boy Scouts will at some point succeed.

I am particularly impressed when young people take this position, because it is especially hard for teenagers to stand up against authority in this way, and indeed to risk the disagreement of their peers. One very impressive scout—an Eagle Scout in fact—who has articulated the courageous moral position of those within the Boy Scout movement who disagree sharply with the organization's discriminatory policy is Michael Peiser. I first came into contact with Mr. Peiser when I was asked to write a letter to congratulate him on his becoming an Eagle Scout. As is my practice, I wrote to him and congratulated him, but simultaneously wrote to the Boy Scout organization that had solicited my letter noting that as a gay man, I did find it odd that they would simultaneously, as an organization, characterize me in such a negative fashion and ask me to congratulate one of the young people. I do not think that the young people themselves should be further victimized, so I write these letters to them of congratulations, but also remind the adult sponsoring entities of my strong disagreement with their policy.

In the case of Mr. Peiser, the Scout leaders to whom I had written shared my letter with him, and he was gracious enough to let me know of his agreement with my position. In fact, he shared with me an essay he had written for his college admissions application, which is a very powerful statement of opposition to the Boy Scout policy. I admire very much Michael Peiser's stance of fighting from within the organization to change this policy, and I ask that his essay be printed here as an example of moral leadership by a young man.

MICHAEL PEISER'S ESSAY

Two years ago, I attended my high school's first Gay/Straight Alliance meeting. As soon as the meeting began, the topic of my in-

volvement in the Boy Scouts of America, which openly discriminates gays, became the focus of the discussion. Suddenly I was being harangued by the other four people at the meeting. The hypocrisy of my being an active member of my local Boy Scout troop, while also being an ardent liberal and supporter of gay rights, had never occurred to me. The official position statement (BSA 1991) is as follows: "We believe that homosexual conduct is inconsistent with the requirement in the Scout Oath that a Scout be morally straight and in the Scout Law that a Scout be clean in word and deed, and that homosexuals do not provide a desirable role model for Scouts."

The two halves of my scouting experience, the first in a culturally diverse troop in Los Angeles and the latter in an affluent northeastern suburban troop, have been quite skewed on the issue of gay scouts. My troop and many other troops with liberal attitudes approach this controversy with a "don't ask don't tell" policy. However, I cannot hide from the fact that this evasion does not address the quandary in any manner. The Boy Scout Organization teaches its members not to hate or to discriminate; yet, having a policy that discriminates against certain individuals inevitably feeds hate.

Last year, at one of my meetings, I was teaching backpacking skills to a group of sixth graders. During the session one of the scouts started to make "gay jokes" toward another scout. The rest of the kids began to make denigrating remarks about homosexuals in scouting. I interjected and asked them why they were making fun of homosexuals and also what they knew about the Scouts' actual policy on homosexuality. The seven scouts in my group unanimously argued that "being gay was not natural and, therefore, should not be allowed in scouting." These notions, which are probably developed outside of the Boy Scouts as well as in my troop, only teach young kids to be closed-minded.

What disturbs me the most about this issue is that Scouting was formed to be a safe haven for all youth. Scouting is supposed to be a place where those who are fortunate and less fortunate can experience what their communities and world have to offer them. Scouting offers so much leadership, friendship, and guidance, that it pains me to see so many different people and organizations, ranging from synagogues to companies like Levi Strauss, completely cut off all support for the Boy Scouts. While I understand the rationale for choosing to do so, I do not feel this helps scouting in any way. I firmly believe that Scouting needs to change its anti-gay policy. Boycotting the organization only makes change more difficult.

Change can only occur from within Scouting. When people ask me how I believe this can be achieved, I tell them the following: when I see discrimination either happening or being talked about among the scouts, I sit down with them and have an open discussion. I believe that, if individual scouts learn to be open and accepting, then, with time, these discriminating policies will change. Today, when people question my support of the Boy Scouts, I tell them exactly what I disagree with, and how I plan to change it.

HONORING WILLIAM BURNS

HON. MIKE THOMPSON

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 4, 2003

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize William "Bill" Burns,

who is being honored on the occasion of his retirement as the District Representative of the Operating Engineers in Eureka, California.

Bill Burns, who was born in Richmond, California, has dedicated his life to the labor movement in our country. He joined Operating Engineers, Local 3 in 1964 as a heavy-duty repair apprentice. After graduating from the apprenticeship program, he began his career as a mechanic and foreman, gaining experience and expertise on Northern California job sites. He was elected the conductor for Local 3 in 1982, a position he has been re-elected to in every election thereafter. Bill was named Business Representative in 1982 in Santa Rosa, California and in 1986 became District Representative in Eureka.

As a recognized community leader, Bill Burns has served on the Board of Directors of United Way; Board Member, Private Industry Council; Member, Citizens for Port Development; Secretary-Treasurer, Central Labor Council; Executive Secretary-Treasurer, Humboldt-Del Norte Building and Construction Trades Council and as a member of the Eureka City Schools Closure Committee. He also coached youth soccer for 10 years.

An active member of the Democratic Party, Bill serves as Vice-Chair and Executive Board member of the Humboldt County Democratic Central Committee. In 1992 he was a Clinton delegate to the Democratic Convention and serves as an Executive Board Member of the California Democratic Party. In 1998, Bill Burns was named Humboldt County Democrat of the Year.

Bill Burns has lived his life with a conscientious and sincere commitment to working people and our democratic traditions. Raising the standard of living for those whose daily labor sustains our nation has been his life's work.

Mr. Speaker, it is appropriate at this time that we recognize Bill Burns for his contributions and service to the people of our country.

TRIBUTE TO THE LATE DR. LAUREL CLARK, "COLUMBIA" ASTRONAUT

HON. TOM UDALL

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 4, 2003

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, it is with profound sadness that I rise today to express my sorrow over the loss the seven astronauts on board the shuttle *Columbia*. At a time when there seemed to be more than enough tragic news to go around, we woke up on a Saturday morning to news reports about a missing space shuttle, and then images of a disintegrating, burning spacecraft streaking across the sky. The memories of the *Challenger* accident were brought back for all of us, with the same sense of shared sadness.

The six American astronauts, together with their Israeli colleague, represented much of the best that our world has to offer. To the honor roll of those who died advancing human knowledge, we add Rick Husband, Michael Anderson, Kalpana Chawla, William McCool, David Brown, Laurel Clark and Ilan Ramon.

President Bush, in his moving tribute to the dead of the *Columbia*, asserted strongly, and wisely, that space exploration must not end: "The cause in which they died will continue."